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Creative dramatics : understanding teachers' perspectives

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CREATIVE DRAMATICS: UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kristi Ann Kraemer

May 2002

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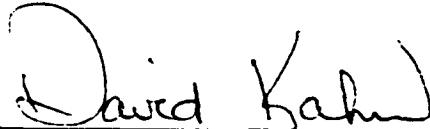
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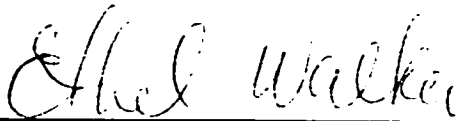
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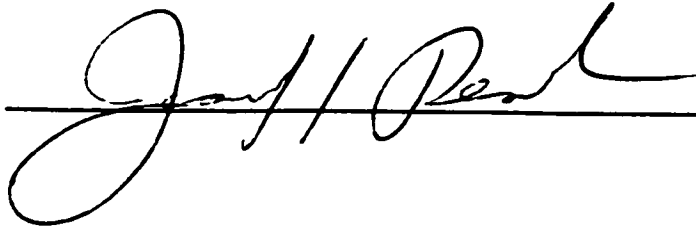


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ABSTRACT

CREATIVE DRAMATICS: UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

by Kristi Ann Kraemer

This thesis addresses the topic of creative dramatics in the elementary classroom, specifically theatre elements used to teach core subject curriculum from a teacher's perspective. It discusses past research on the benefits of creative dramatics, reports how elementary teachers are currently incorporating creative dramatics into their teaching style, and offers suggestions and resources for using creative dramatics with children.

Research indicates that although many teachers in selected districts report using creative dramatics in their classroom, the extent of this use is limited due to perceived obstacles of this method of teaching. Using lesson plans collected from teachers surveyed and resources available from professional local theatres, this thesis attempts to assist teachers in furthering their use of creative dramatics in the elementary classroom.

**This thesis is dedicated to
all the teachers and administrators who participated in the research.**

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LIST OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

ANW: A Noise Within

ATC: Arizona Theatre Company

ATP: Actor's Theatre of Phoenix

DWoK: Different Ways of Knowing Program

GP: Geffen Playhouse

LJP: La Jolla Playhouse

PT: The Phoenix Theatre

RAFT: Resource Area for Teachers

SCT: Seattle Children's Theatre

SFLA: Shakespeare Festival Los Angeles

SJRT: Red Ladder Theatre Company

SRT: Seattle Repertory Theatre

TCAP: The California Arts Project

VYT: Valley Youth Theatre

Chapter One – Creative Dramatics: An Overview

Introduction

“Research indicates that there are some concrete positive experiences and qualities – ‘developmental assets’ – which have a tremendous influence on young people’s lives ... arts programs are well-suited to become truly powerful catalysts in the effort to create positive growth in the lives of our youth” (Piemme 1). This statement, along with the findings of other research in arts education – including a recent study by Shirley Brice Heath of Stanford University, helps support the importance of arts education as seen from a researcher’s standpoint. In 2000, the California Department of Education drafted theatre standards for the elementary classroom based on the Visual and Performing Arts Frameworks – goals for elementary theatre education. These goals addressed specific expectations in the areas of artistic perception, creative expression, historical and cultural context, aesthetic valuing, and connections, relations, and applications. However, district-based requirements vague in stating their expectations for teachers when it comes to what types of art activities, more specifically theatre, are expected in the elementary school classroom. In turn, there seems to be a lack of theatre in the elementary school classroom. Why is this? What obstacles do teachers face in attempting to integrate creative dramatics into their daily routine? What components of creative dramatics can be integrated into the curriculum without the need for further extensive training and great monetary cost? This thesis will report how

selected teachers use creative dramatics to teach core subjects in their classrooms. In addition, it will report on outreach programs with the mission of integrating theatre into the teaching of core subjects, and evaluate sample creative dramatics lesson plans.

Past Research

Creative dramatics can be defined in many ways, but for the purposes of this thesis the term will refer to the use of various aspects of theatre as a method to teach core subjects such as social science, reading, and science. These aspects of theatre include role playing, storytelling, historical drama, character creation and improvisation. It is true that music, dance, and other performing art forms may be considered by some to be included in the umbrella category of "creative dramatics" or "theatre," but to keep the scope of this study manageable, it will be limited strictly to theatre. Teachers use creative dramatics to varying degrees within their daily routine. The goal of creative dramatics is not just to teach the lesson – simple lecture and test teaching methods can accomplish that – but also to help the students learn team-work, effective communication skills, and self confidence which in turn encourage positive growth.

Theatre, by nature of the art form, is a hands on and engaging activity. There is a live element in theatre that is not present in most other art forms. The actors are in front of you in a more intimate way than when they are on the screen. By incorporating this idea into teaching through creative dramatics, some educational researchers feel that students are more engaged and involved

in the lesson, which in turn helps them later to recall the facts for testing purposes. This idea is one that will be discussed later.

In 2000, the National Endowment for the Arts, in collaboration with the United States Department of Education, published a brochure entitled *The Arts and Education: Partners in Achieving Our National Education Goals*. In this publication, they stated four reasons why arts are indispensable to education reform:

1. Arts engage students in learning a variety of ways that enable them to develop many areas of intelligence and different 'habits of mind'
2. Research shows clearly that the arts help children build both basic and advanced thinking skills, develop problem-posing and problem-solving skills, and instruct children in diverse modes of thinking and learning.
3. The arts reach students who are otherwise disempowered and disenfranchised by providing diverse routes to academic and personal achievement.
4. As well as being valuable in their own right, the arts help students build solid connections with other academic areas and to integrate their learning. (21-22)

"Dramatic activity is a way of exploring subject matter and its relationships to self and society, a way of 'making personal meaning and sense of universal, abstract, social, moral and ethical concepts through the concrete experience of the drama'" (Robbins 1). Although statements like this previous one by Robbins make it sound like creative dramatics will solve children's social problems, it is important to look more critically at creative dramatics. Like every teaching method or social activity, there are benefits and obstacles. Creative dramatics is no exception.

Much research has been done verifying the benefits of an arts education. Bruce Robbins conducted a study in 1988 in which he drew the conclusion that

drama in the classroom was most useful when teaching topics that did not have a definite, exact answer. His opinion was that the use of drama allowed students to explore possibilities on many different levels. In his remarks, he states "As collaborator and guide, the teacher sets the topic and starts things in motion ... The teacher encourages students to take the major responsibility for giving meaning to the curricular concepts and to communicate them through action, gesture and dialogue" (10). Robbins then discusses other researchers who share this opinion (Heathcote and O'Neill) and agrees that by using drama in education, teacher and student work together to gather information and meaning. All three share the opinion that by working together with the children, as creative dramatics allows, the learning experience is more fruitful for the child. The child has a sense of ownership of his work. While taking ownership of one's work is a great benefit of this style of teaching what, if anything, is lacking? For example, are students exposed to the same amount of information as they would be if the teacher used more traditional lecture style teaching methods?

Jeffrey Kaplan's article "Acting Up Across the Curriculum: Using Creative Dramatics to Explore Adolescent Literature" explores the benefits of using creative dramatics in the reading/literature programs in schools. He explores concepts similar to Robbins, collaboration between teacher and student to explore many possible solutions for example. He quotes William Purkey as saying that schooling should be "a coming together for creative, worthwhile purposes that can extend human experiences." He goes on to state that in his

opinion “real learning is joyful. Learning, and more importantly, collaborating in the learning experience, is an invitation to pure excitement” (Kaplan 3). These blanket statements may sound as though they have determined that creative dramatics, or using theatre to teach, can solve all the problems of today’s learners. This is a nice thought, but how much truth does it hold? This research will not only look at how creative dramatics is being used, but it will also discuss why creative dramatics cannot claim to be the ultimate solution to the difficulties faced by today’s teachers and students.

Additionally, David Best is quoted in John Somers’ compilation of research papers as saying, “I learned history and geography in the most tedious, traditional way – lists of meaningless dates, acts of Parliament etc.; naming meaningless shapes on meaningless maps etc. Theatre can make these disciplines personally meaningful: children understand because they feel, they feel because they understand, what it is to live at other periods of history, and in other parts of the world” (16).

Most recently, a study by Shirley Brice Heath of Stanford University and Laura Smyth of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching discussing the need for community-based arts programs was published. Some of their findings included the following:

- Compared with high school students in a national sample (which included youth in arts based programs and those not in arts based programs), youth in community based arts programs are twice as likely to win an award for academic achievement, eight times more likely to win a community service award, and four times more likely to participate in a math or science fair. They are also 25% more likely to report feeling satisfied with themselves and 31% more likely to say they plan to continue education past high school.

- Youth in non-school arts programs are more than twice as likely as those in the national sample to see themselves working to correct economic inequities.
- It costs between \$900 and \$1100 annually to provide one child with non-school arts programming; it costs between \$36,000 and \$100,000 annually to pay for a youth in trouble. (13)

Of course these statistics are more in support of after-school or recreational arts programs, but it still offers support for the benefits of art education. It shows that students with access to art education programs grow not only in academic areas, but personal and social areas as well. The problem? Not all children have access to these community based art education programs. By integrating arts and creative dramatics into teaching core subjects can students still gain some of the skills and experiences they do in non-school arts programs such as the ability to work well with others and self-confidence? This thesis will look at possible answers to this question as well.

Similarly, there was a 1997 study done by the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, and their published results showed “a positive relationship between standardized test scores, English grades, and other educational methods. The study revealed that students in 8th and 10th grade who had ‘high involvement’ in the arts, in and out of class, consistently outscored those with low exposure to the arts. Students with high arts exposure were also less likely to drop out of school”(Louv). UC Irvine researchers (in 1993) determined through their studies that “students who took piano lessons scored an average of 34 percent higher on tests of spatial-temporal ability, which educators consider a vital skill for understanding math and science” (Louv).

There is also research by Holt regarding the psychology of a child's learning process in school and why certain children learn more easily or more quickly than others. In his book *Why Children Fail*, Holt discusses a child's fear in the classroom environment. His argument is that, from an early age in school, children are taught that there is one correct way to approach a problem and that is the way they must learn how to do it. He furthers this by arguing that for many children this causes an unnecessary anxiety when it comes to their schoolwork. They become so scared they aren't going to give the correct response to the question that they don't even want to try. This is something that sticks with them throughout their education. They become known as the "bad" student or the student that is "not so bright" because from an early age they were afraid of failure. According to Holt, the lack of retention of information could have nothing to do with the intellectual capacity of the student, but rather the method in which they are most comfortable learning. Children learn in different ways.

Other studies agree that students of the arts develop a different style of learning. After observing various groups' rehearsals during his visit to the Interlochen Center for the Arts in July 2000, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley stated, "Through their practice and persistence, these students have learned that they can master challenging tasks... I call the arts 'a new skill for the twenty-first century.' They certainly need to be a basic part of every school's curriculum" ("Vote"). Anyone who has ever played an instrument, learned a new aria, attempted a new leap or turn in a dance class can tell you that it is not

something you get right on your first attempt. This is where the style of learning is different from standard classroom learning. In standard classroom learning, when a child gives an incorrect answer he is told that he is wrong, and the teacher moves on to another student who may have the correct answer. A musician (or other artist) may play the wrong note, and the instructor tells her to try again. She knows that you cannot always be right the first time. This is not to say that teachers should stick to one child until they give the correct response, which can also put unnecessary pressure on a child and waste valuable class time while the teacher waits for the correct answer. However, it does suggest that children who have studied art or drama or music understand that learning a new idea (whether it be a piece of music or a new math concept) takes time. Some students will learn it more quickly than others, and they won't always be correct or perfect their first time out, but in time and with practice they will learn. This is another concept that arts education and creative dramatics teaches a child.

Again, this research will not attempt to prove that arts based education is the solution for all children and can make every child score above the national average as some of these studies report. It will explore whether creative dramatics, as seen through the eyes of teachers, not researchers, not only gives a child the opportunity to learn something in a different, and in some cases more relaxed or less pressured atmosphere, but also helps them learn the essential skills of communication, collaboration, and creative thinking. These three skills will not only benefit them as children, but throughout their lives. The collected

data relates to teachers' opinions of drama-based educational methods, and discusses what they see as the benefits and shortfalls of these methods. The data is also assessed based on the three concepts of communication, collaboration, and creative thinking, and whether or not teachers feel that their experiences with creative dramatics has not only taught the lesson, but reinforced these three skills in their students. The research will also discuss what other methods teachers feel accomplish these goals more successfully or to an equal degree of success as creative dramatics.

What is the problem then? How should schools take this research into consideration? Should they enhance their arts programs? If creative dramatics proves to be a favored method of teachers, should all teachers use creative dramatics for teaching? Unfortunately, the answers are not simple. "No methods course can prepare teachers perfectly, for no two groups are alike. What works with one class may not work with another" (McCaslin 373). Today's teachers have issues such as crowded classrooms and lack of parent participation to deal with, and their main concern is probably to get the necessary information to a student who can then move up to the next level. In addition, providing an arts based education, using teaching methods such as creative dramatics, may not be a high priority on most teachers' lists as they are more concerned with preparing students for standardized tests and making the best use of their limited classroom time. After looking at the benefits of creative dramatics, why is it not more of a priority? How many teachers actually use

creative dramatics? If they don't use creative dramatics, why not? These are all questions this thesis will discuss.

Educational researchers know the importance of the arts in a child's education. The previously discussed studies show that arts education teaches a child that it takes time to learn something new, to "think creatively," to work as a team or group, and how to express themselves effectively and understandably. With the lack of financial resources to fund arts programs in many schools, and with many families not being able to afford private arts after school programs for their children, how can the arts still be incorporated into the basic curriculum allowing for the benefits of an arts education for all children?

This thesis will not only look at teachers' preferences (both positive and negative) in regard to creative dramatics as a teaching tool, but also methods educators and theatre professionals have used to integrate arts (theatre specifically) into the basic subject curriculum with some degree of success. Along with creative dramatics program successes, it is also important to discuss obstacles and failures. Through teachers' responses to surveys about their current uses of drama as a teaching tool and program evaluations of theatre based teaching programs, answers or ideas that can help answer the following questions may be obtained:

- How was and how often was creative dramatics integrated into your core subject curriculum? Give an example of an activity/lesson.
- How difficult was it to create a program that incorporated theatre into the teaching of basic subject requirements?

- What did the children gain from this style of teaching and how was this assessment measured?
- What do you think was missing from the lessons by using this style of teaching? What was lost by this method?
- Is this a method that any teacher (regardless of whether they have an arts background or not) can utilize in the classroom?
- Did this method of teaching require any more time or money than standard teaching?

Chapter two will discuss the survey questions and why they were asked.

The following chapter will report and discuss the responses. Shortfalls of the survey will also be addressed. Finally, chapter four will site examples of resources and sample creative dramatics lesson plans.

Chapter Two – Survey Development: What Questions Should Be Asked and Why

The first step in arriving at any type of assessment of the questions about creative dramatics and its uses in today's classrooms is to find out what career teachers, as opposed to researchers, feel about creative dramatics. Since teachers are the ones who work day-to-day with curriculum requirements and make the decisions about their teaching methods, it is necessary to understand why they choose to use creative dramatics or why they choose not to use creative dramatics. It is important before making any further statements or suggestions relating to creative dramatics for me as a researcher, and for readers, to understand it as a practical tool and to understand how it is being used not only in academic theory, but in practice.

According to The Basic Assumptions for the California Arts Projects, "Successful teachers are the most credible teachers of their teacher-colleagues". ("TCAP") The way this research will answer the questions is by gathering information from teachers themselves. They are the ones who this type of research could have the greatest effect on, and they are the ones that can offer some real answers about the use of creative dramatics and how practical it is as a teaching method. In order to offer them suggestions for using a method of teaching that they are not familiar with currently or that they feel is not effective, it is important to understand why they don't use it or why they feel it is not effective so that these concerns can be addressed in the analysis. Citing specific

examples where other teachers are successful using creative dramatics in their classrooms will make the research more credible. If they are already using creative dramatics, new ways that they can expand their current uses of creative dramatics are offered, showing them how other teachers are using creative dramatics to a different extent. Teachers who use creative dramatics regularly, have suggestions or lesson ideas that would be helpful to other teachers who are perhaps intimidated or unsure of how to use creative dramatics in their own classroom. Since these ideas will come from practicing teachers, the suggestions may hold more weight than if they were coming from a researcher who does not currently work in a classroom on a regular basis. Surveying both teachers who use creative dramatics and those who don't will not only help find out teachers' concerns, but will also allow for a sharing of ideas of how to use creative dramatics lessons that their peers are already finding useful and effective. Hopefully, the cycle of this research is ongoing. Not only can this type of research serve as a way to report on current teaching preferences, but it can be a vehicle to share teaching methods with other teachers.

Below is a list of the survey questions that the teachers received, and with them a brief rationale as to why that question was asked. The questions on the survey will include:

- **How was and how often was creative dramatics integrated into your core subject curriculum? Give an example of an activity/lesson.** This question was designed to not only get an answer to the primary focus of the thesis, but also to see the extent of the creativity in the teaching methods of the teacher

who is answering this particular survey. Do teachers only use more obvious and well-known creative dramatics ideas in their teaching such as story drama in a reading lesson, or do they take their use of creative dramatics to another level by having students act out word problems in their math lessons? I also asked teachers to give an example of a creative dramatics lesson they use to help me gather ideas for the final chapter of this thesis which contains lesson plan ideas that teachers can use in their classrooms with no additional training or money. Not only did I find teachers who use creative dramatics, but also teachers who are opposed to using creative dramatics for various reasons. Consider the earlier discussed obstacle of a researcher in theatre arts giving suggestions for lessons using creative dramatics to teachers who are opposed to or intimidated by the idea of creative dramatics as a teaching tool. If I were to offer my own lesson plan suggestions to teachers opposed to or that currently do not use creative dramatics, I may not be taken as seriously since teaching is not what I do on a daily basis. However, by using answers from the teachers who do use creative dramatics, I can give their examples of creative dramatics lessons. What is avoided by recommending lessons that other teachers already use is the attitude that non-teachers (like myself) don't understand what it is like to teach.

- **How difficult was it to create a program that incorporated theatre into the teaching of basic subject requirements?** This question addresses some of the obstacles that teachers feel they are faced with when using creative

dramatics. The answers are wide ranging and include everything from creative dramatics not being used because the teacher doesn't know how to use it to them being afraid to use it. It was also apparent that many teachers, especially those who have been teaching for twenty or thirty years, go by the old "if it isn't broken, why fix it" rule of thumb. They have their methods that they use and they have been using to some degree of success since they began their career, so why should they change now? There are a few arguments for this change, and the biggest argument is not only Holt's argument that different children learn in different ways and you need to combine teaching methods to get the ideas across to a diverse student body, but also that children today are exposed to so many different stimuli on a daily basis that teachers need to be sure they are keeping the lessons fresh enough to engage the child. Some children do respond well to hearing lectures and retain the information they hear (I know this is the case, as I was that type of student). Others, however, lose concentration when being lectured at and once that concentration is lost, no information the teacher is giving will be retained. Creative dramatics in this circumstance is supported by Somers' statement "Theatre can make these disciplines personally meaningful: children understand because they feel" (16). By combining the lectures with more creative teaching methods, a teacher can be assured that the concepts are getting across not only to the children who retained the lecture information but also by the children who required a little more active stimuli to keep their attention, and to emotionally attach them to the

material. If a child is on his feet actively participating in a lesson, it may be easier for him to recall the concepts when he is asked to sit down and report on his new knowledge – whether through a quiz or other assessment method. The idea behind this question also comes from Robbins' idea "the teacher encourages students to take the major responsibility for giving meaning to the curricular concepts and to communicate them through action, gesture, and dialogue."

- **What did the children gain from this style of teaching and how was this assessment measured?** This question was included to encourage dialogue about tangible results of teaching with creative dramatics and to determine how the teacher reached this conclusion. San Jose Repertory Theatre's Red Ladder Company (SJRT) reported an increased ability in many social skills through the use of creative dramatics (Piemme 16). "The bilingual teachers at Benavidez School in Houston have found Different Ways of Knowing (DWoK) to be a powerful tool in helping their second language learners participate fully in their learning of content and concepts while gaining English language skills." ("Bringing") Was creative dramatics helpful in teaching the students of surveyed students as well, or was it just a fun time to break up the various segments of the day as critics of the method may argue? It is important to know whether the teachers who answer the survey in favor of using creative dramatics are actually testing the results and have some evidence that this method is effective in relaying the information to their class. I have been in classrooms where the "creative dramatics" being

used is not teaching a lesson at all but rather just allowing for some fun time for the children to be creative. There isn't anything wrong with this, as it still allows the students to work together as a team, learn to think creatively, and learn skills of communication and collaboration, however for the purposes of this study, which aims to look at how these concepts are being used to teach core subjects, it is irrelevant. Creative dramatics, as it is discussed in this thesis does have the goal of teaching the students how to communicate and collaborate with their classmates, but these goals are in addition to the initial goal of teaching the lesson. In discussing creative dramatics under the assumption that it is a teaching method, this thesis hopes to put to rest some of the opinions that it is a frivolous use of time in a classroom. For this reason, it is important also to know that the students are coming away from a creative dramatics lesson with some new knowledge or understanding of a concept instead of just a feeling that they played a game and had fun but will quickly forget any new information presented.

In Heath's study, she uses standardized tests as a method to measure "success" of arts programs. In programs such as San Jose Repertory Theatre's Red Ladder, "success" is measured by assessing individual improvement in given areas after creative dramatics was utilized in the classroom. All teachers have different opinions as to how to measure "success" based on a combination of school and district requirements and personal opinion. For this reason, it is important to know how a teacher claiming creative dramatics was successful measures "success."

- **What do you think was missing from the lessons by using this style of teaching? What was lost by this method?** No teaching method covers every aspect of a set curriculum and a teacher's set objectives. Additionally, no method of teaching is equally effective with every student. As discussed earlier, some students learn by hearing the ideas, others learn by seeing the ideas, while finally others learn by experiencing the ideas. That is why no single teaching method should be used on its own in a classroom. A teacher who teaches solely through lecture may not reach the visual learners or those who learn by doing and vice versa. This leads to the idea that every method of teaching has a shortfall or a component that is missing. With the lecture method, for example, the component that is missing may be time allowed for students to learn to work as a team or communicate their ideas. When a student is lectured to five or six hours a day, their interaction with others is very limited. Just as there is this shortfall with the teach by lecture method, there are certain unavoidable shortfalls when using creative dramatics. To take this example to the extreme, as was done with the lecture method, imagine a class that is only taught using creative dramatics and there are obviously going to be components missing that may be evident when teaching through other methods. One missing element in some teachers' eyes is discipline. While lecture requires that students sit and pay attention, creative dramatics may seem more chaotic, less disciplined or structured. There are also questions regarding how much of the information is actually being taught when creative dramatics is implemented. What are the

components of the lessons that are not addressed when using creative
dramatics? Were there types of students who benefited from a creative
dramatics lesson more than other students?

- **Is this a method that all teachers can utilize in the classroom?** This question was asked because it adds to the discussion of obstacles teachers encounter when using creative dramatics. It will allow the research to explore not only the reasons why teachers choose not to use creative dramatics at all, but why teachers who do use creative dramatics feel that those who don't might find it a difficult method to use. Some teachers who are not using creative dramatics, are intimidated by the label "creative dramatics" as it causes them to think it is something that requires specific training. While some teacher training programs do include coursework in creative dramatics for potential teachers, it is not necessary for this type of course to be taken in order for creative dramatics to be used. Some feel that using a "dramatic" teaching method will require them to be performers themselves. Perhaps it is the case that all of the teachers who use creative dramatics in their classrooms had teachers when they were younger that used creative dramatics so they experienced first hand benefits of creative dramatics, or maybe all the teachers using creative dramatics were theatre or other performing arts majors in college. And still others are lucky enough to have access to programs sponsored by professional arts organizations that help them incorporate drama in their classrooms. These factors seem to make them more prone to using creative dramatics in their own teaching and

some feel that these experiences make it easier for them to incorporate creative dramatics in their classrooms. Do teachers who use creative dramatics have people they look to for ideas or do they come up with lessons on their own? Do they take lessons from a pre-published book on creative lesson plans or use lessons that they have seen other teachers use. Some teachers may feel their set curriculum doesn't allow for the use of a creative teaching method. It is important to look at all these possibilities.

- **Did this method of teaching require any more time or money than standard teaching?** In her book *Creative Dramatics in the Classroom and Beyond* Nellie McCaslin states, "With such an abundance of riches it is easy to understand why so many believe that drama and theatre constitute an elaborate art form, difficult to implement and expensive to maintain" (5). In 1996, Youth Theatre Journal published an article by Debra Hundert in which she cited a previous study by Christie Kaaland-Wells dealing with Tacoma, WA teachers' perspectives of creative dramatics. In Kaaland-Wells' study, one of the primary obstacles of using creative dramatics as reported by her subjects was "lack of time due to existing curriculum demands." (Hundert 26) Considering the previous statements, combined with demands on today's teachers to prepare students for standardized testing, and with district budgets being cut across the country, time and money were the two reasons that seemed to stand out as top reasons teachers would give for not using creative dramatics. In the end, this question helped determine not only if time and money were deterrents for teachers to not use creative dramatics,

but also whether teachers who use creative dramatics actually do spend additional time on lessons or extra money on supplies. Answers on how teachers get materials for creative dramatics lessons (such as props and costumes if needed) if they aren't spending extra money were also received. Some teachers use art class to make the props. Some ask for old things to be donated from home and use them in unusual ways. For some, there is a local resource for these supplies. For teachers who do say that teaching with creative dramatics requires additional time and money, it is necessary to discuss ways around these obstacles, and suggestions from the surveyed teachers are a helpful guide. Are the teachers spending a lot of money making fancy costumes for story drama? If so, could the same effect be accomplished by having the children create construction paper masks for their characters and use materials that are readily available at the school? Teachers who are using creative dramatics have other suggestions on how to use creative dramatics without additional costs.

To keep this research manageable and to ensure close comparison of the data more closely, boundaries were placed on the data collection. Kindergarten through Third Grade teachers were chosen to participate because through personal experience teaching and planning after school enrichment curriculum I observed that students of this age are more open to try new things and have also been more open to learning through less traditional methods such as creative dramatics. The students haven't been in school long enough to have formed opinions of how they feel teachers should be presenting information, so teachers

have a bit more freedom in their methods. When the children get older, they also tend to become more reserved in their actions in the classroom as they begin to have more of a concern for what other students in the class think about them. Older children become worried with whether or not it is “cool” to participate in certain activities, whereas the younger child hasn’t reached that stage yet. Also, much previous research on creative dramatics in the classroom focused on high school students where they are required by state and federal standards to enroll in an art elective course, and I wanted to provide some new information on students earlier in their educational careers. The research found on younger children seemed to focus primarily on educational psychology and then skip over to offer lesson plan ideas, or it discussed specific programs, usually sponsored by arts groups or educational foundations, and how they were of benefit to one particular classroom or district. The previous research seemed to lack information about how individual teachers have learned to use creative dramatics on their own in their classrooms and what specific goals various lessons using creative dramatics accomplished. While there are plenty of books available in the local library that offer ideas for creative lesson plans, very few take the time to discuss what learning goals were reached and how these lessons were used or viewed by teachers, and even fewer were written by actual practicing teachers. Although some of the lessons the surveyed teachers suggested did originally come from people at local arts organizations, the teachers have been able to recreate these lessons on their own, without the assistance of the arts professionals. Additionally, the classroom teachers

surveyed can provide justification for their various creative lessons that has credibility unparalleled by a justification given by a researcher or artist.

The data is discussed based not only on the answers themselves, but also on the grade level of the class and the location of the school. Location is an important factor to look at in this study because each school district has different resources available to them. Some districts have more money allocated to training teachers and some districts have assistance from local theatre companies in incorporating creative dramatics into their programs. Some schools in the San Jose School District, for example, have assistance in their implementation of creative dramatics through the Red Ladder Theatre Company of San Jose Repertory Theatre (SJRT). Some districts may pour all of their extra budget into arts while other poorer districts may have more academic needs or technology based needs such as computers and specialists. Prior to the survey, I thought that where the district is located and how the district chooses to allocate extra funds would make a difference in the extent that teachers use creative dramatics – this did not prove to be true. Teachers in both “rich” and “poor” districts had similar concerns. Some areas have places where teachers can go to get props for free or near free. In San Jose there is a place called R.A.F.T. (Resource Area for Teachers). In this “store” teachers can get anything from bottle caps to old fabric and sometimes even pre-made costumes for little or no cost. This does require extra time on the teacher’s part, but can really save in the expense department and can add something to the lessons. In an attempt to keep the comparisons on a similar level between the school districts with varying resources available to

them, a few constants needed to be created. The survey utilized schools that were in major metropolitan areas or their immediate surrounding suburbs. All the areas selected also have access to professional regional theatres that have programs for students. This was a factor because that would mean there was a greater chance the teachers and students had some (even if it was seeing one performance) exposure to theatre, whereas students at a rural school may be too far away from a large professional theatre to have this opportunity. The following school districts participated in my survey:

1. Seattle Schools in Seattle, WA
2. Los Angeles Unified School District in Los Angeles County, CA
3. Deer Valley Unified School District in Glendale/Phoenix, AZ
4. Cupertino Union School District in Cupertino/San Jose, CA
5. Palo Alto School District in Palo Alto, CA
6. San Diego Unified School District in San Diego, CA
7. Redondo Beach Unified School District in Redondo Beach/Los Angeles, CA

A survey was chosen, as opposed to other methods of data collection, for a few reasons. First, it allows for easy collection of data from teachers not only in the surrounding area, but surveys can also be mailed to teachers in other districts allowing for a wider range of answers and perspectives. There are problems with direct mail, which this survey is, such as lack of response, but it does reach a very large pool of potential respondents. If a method such as interviewing or observing teachers teach was used, lack of travel budget and other time

commitments would limit the variety of teachers I could collect information from. Surveys also have the benefit of being anonymous. If a teacher knows that the answers given can in no way be traced back to him, he may be more likely to make a comment like, "I would use creative dramatics, but my principal doesn't allow creative teaching methods" than if his name was attached to his answer.

Prior to distributing this survey, I had formed a few theories about the types and frequencies of different answers I would receive. First was that more responses from people in favor of or that use creative dramatics in their classrooms would be received because the survey is of interest to them and they may feel they have something to offer. This skews the results somewhat. Therefore, there is not as large a sampling of respondents who do not use creative dramatics which limits the variety in the answers from this pool that were received. It also limits the responses relating to why teachers who don't use creative dramatics have chosen not to use creative dramatics as a teaching method and what other alternative or creative methods are used.

The second theory was that the two top reasons why teachers don't use creative dramatics in their classrooms is that they don't have enough time to either plan the lessons or implement them without cutting into the time required for units predetermined by their districts, and they don't have enough money for supplies for these activities. The responses from teachers who do use creative dramatics offer suggestions to the teachers who have these obstacles as to how they can overcome them.

Of course there were other reasons teachers had for not using creative dramatics in their classrooms. Because teachers have so many concepts to teach their students and so many requirements in order to prepare them for successful completion of state and federally mandated standardized tests, they may tend to use the quickest method and the method that has already proven to be effective most of the time to teach these concepts and creative dramatics might not occur to them as being a quick and proven method.

A goal of this research was to come away from it with something to offer back to the teachers who participated and to teachers who are simply interested in exploring a new method of teaching. The first chapter of this thesis discussed some of the pros and cons of teaching with creative dramatics, and some of creative dramatics' non-academic goals (communication, collaboration and creative thinking). These goals not only help enhance the classroom learning experience, but help children move to the next stage in their social development. They are skills that are most useful if they are learned early on. Hopefully, this research can be helpful to teachers who have doubts about creative dramatics and those who are simply afraid to try something new. Maybe they just don't know where to start; they can't think up a simple lesson to try out to see if creative dramatics works in their classroom.

This research also hopes to fill a gap in resources. Many of my classmates went into teaching and their first year out they purchased books to help them come up with creative lessons for their classrooms. This is a great start. However these resources seem to either be rather old and out of date or include

very few activities that utilize drama. When going to the library, one finds several books (Landy, Siks, Barnfield) on creative dramatics in the classroom with lesson plan ideas but the many were written twenty to thirty years ago. Those books that were written more recently seemed to focus more on the psychology of a child's learning process and how creative dramatics can help children in their emotional development. Very few (McCaslin) listed actual lesson plans for a "beginner" to test out or sited examples of how teachers are using creative dramatics effectively in the modern classroom. Finally, many were written by researchers or child psychologists and didn't look at the opinions and practices of actual classroom teachers, but rather based their research on their own observations. Not to say that there is anything bad or wrong with this – it is very helpful in a variety of ways – but it does leave a gap in the research on creative dramatics.

This gap cannot be completely filled with the research from this project alone. It will begin to add information that can be useful not only to the researcher in elementary education or learning psychology, but also serve a practical purpose for elementary school classroom teachers.

Four hundred teachers of grades K-3 were surveyed and asked what types of art/ dramatics activities are used in their classrooms to teach non-art (or Core) subjects. Additional questions include:

- If you do use creative dramatics in your classroom, was it difficult to create a program that incorporated creative dramatics into the teaching of basic subject requirements?

- How was the use of creative dramatics successful in teaching your students new concepts? How did you measure this success?
- Do you think anything was missing from the lessons by using this style of teaching that is present in more traditional styles of teaching? Explain.
- Is this something that any teacher (regardless of whether they have an arts background or not) can utilize in their classroom?
- Do you feel this method of teaching requires any more time or money than standard teaching?
- If you do not use creative dramatics in your classroom, do you use a different method of teaching that you feel especially enhances student performance?
- If you do not use creative dramatics, do you have other methods to accomplish the goals of creative dramatics, such as student self-confidence, ability to work as a team and commitment to learning?

After getting responses, a comparative model that discusses previous research on creative dramatics and deals with how creative dramatics can be used in the classroom (programs such as Different Ways of Knowing [DwoK] and Red Ladder Theatre Company [SJRT] will be discussed), and compares that to the obstacles that teachers feel they face in the incorporation of creative dramatics into their classrooms was set up. From this comparison, discussion will arise regarding ways of addressing these obstacles. The survey served as an important tool in helping me and other non-teachers understand the obstacles of creative dramatics from the perspective of a teacher. It will provoke discussion

about teacher attitudes towards the idea of integrating creative dramatics into their classrooms.

With only 60 teachers responding out of the 400 solicited by the survey, the data may be biased due to the fact that teachers in favor of creative dramatics may be more likely to return the survey than the teachers who do not use creative dramatics. This would cause the data to show that more teachers use creative dramatics in their classroom. The truth here is that more teachers who took the time to submit the survey use creative dramatics in their classrooms. This does not mean that the data is false, but that there may be an explainable favoring of creative dramatics. Even if this turns out to be the case, the survey will still be able to provide the key information needed for further discussion of teachers' perspectives of creative dramatics – that is how it is being used, what using creative dramatics accomplishes/its effectiveness, and how teachers who are not using creative dramatics may be able to overcome some of the obstacles they feel are preventing them from using creative dramatics.

Chapter Three – What the Teachers Said

Four hundred surveys were distributed to teachers in the following districts: Los Angeles Unified School District, CA; Redondo Beach City School District, CA; San Diego School District, CA; Cupertino Unified School District, CA; Palo Alto School District, CA; Seattle School District, WA; and Phoenix School District, AZ. Of those 400 surveys distributed, 59 were returned with usable responses and one was returned unusable because the handwriting was illegible. The following data tables report these responses.

Table One: Do you use creative dramatics in your classroom?

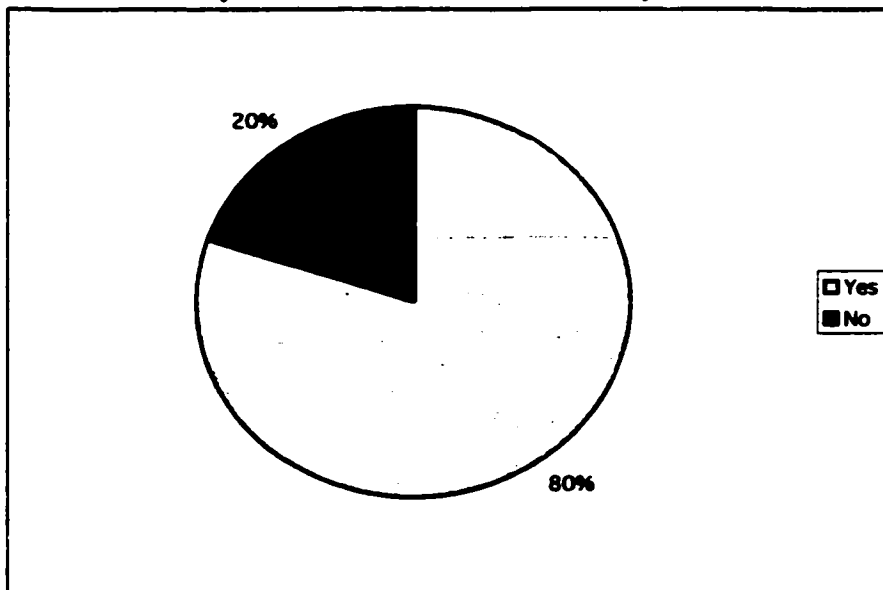


Table Two: If you do use creative dramatics, was it difficult to use?

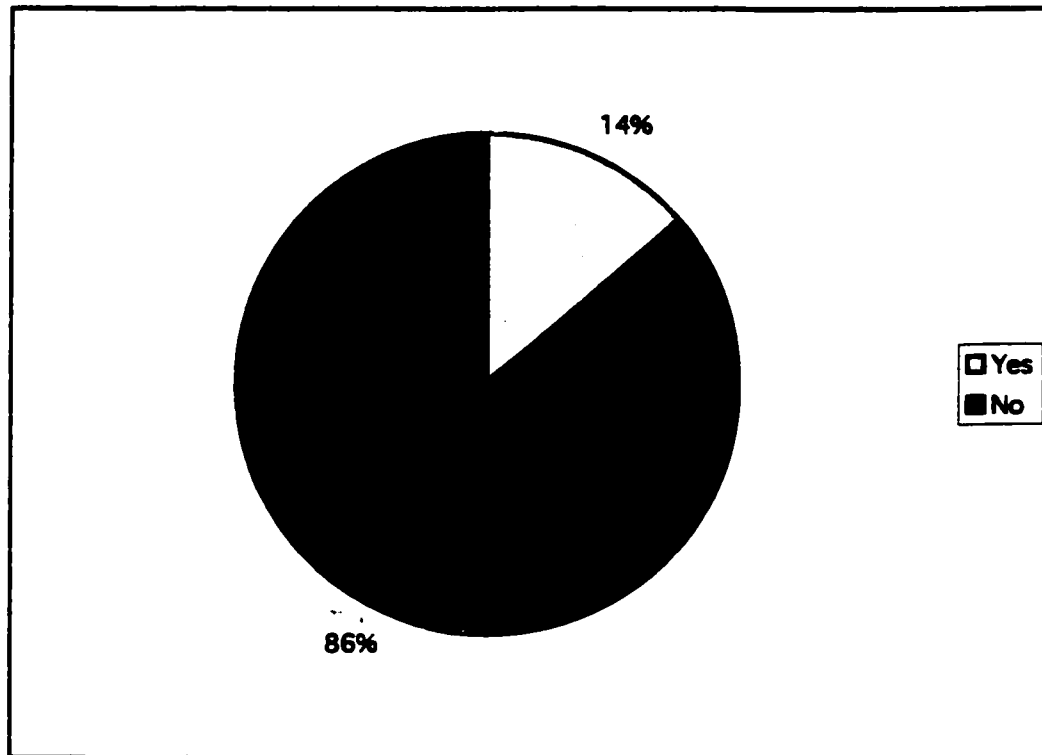


Table Three: If you do use creative dramatics, what successes (if any) did you notice? *The numbers in the right hand column refer to the number of teachers who gave that response.*

Better Comprehension of Ideas	25
Students More Involved	13
Improved Ideas in Writing	2
Brings Ideas to Life	2
Saw Test Scores Improve	3
Helps with Patterning in Math	3
Helpful to Reiterate Concepts	1
Puppets Helpful with Phonics	1
Greater Student Enthusiasm	1
Improved Reading Skills	2
Saw Biggest Change in Visual Learners	4
Better Ability to Work with Others	5
Helps ESL Students Learn English/ Increase Vocabulary	3

Table Four: Did you notice anything was missing by using creative dramatics as a teaching method, and if so what were they? *The numbers in the right hand column refer to the number of teachers who gave that response.*

No	21
Traditional Methods Still Used, Creative Drama is for Enhancement	13
Can be Good if Not Used Too Often	1
Some Students Think it is Just a Game	2
Doesn't Allow Students to Practice Writing	4
Yes w/now specific explanation	1

Table Five: Can creative dramatics be used by any teacher regardless of training?

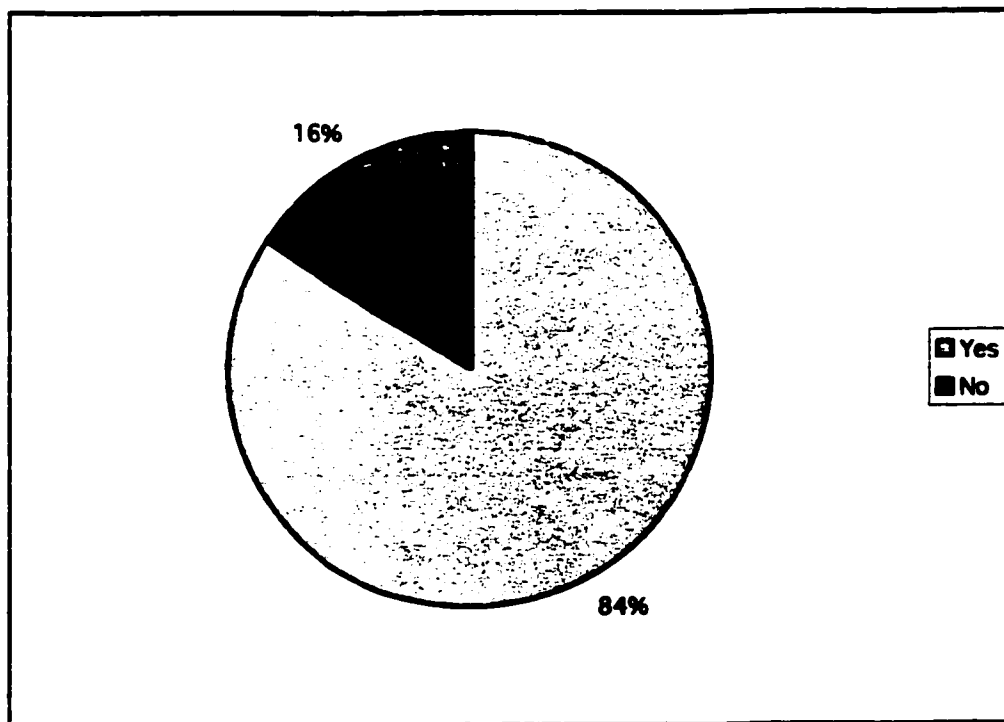


Table Six: Did using creative dramatics require any additional time?

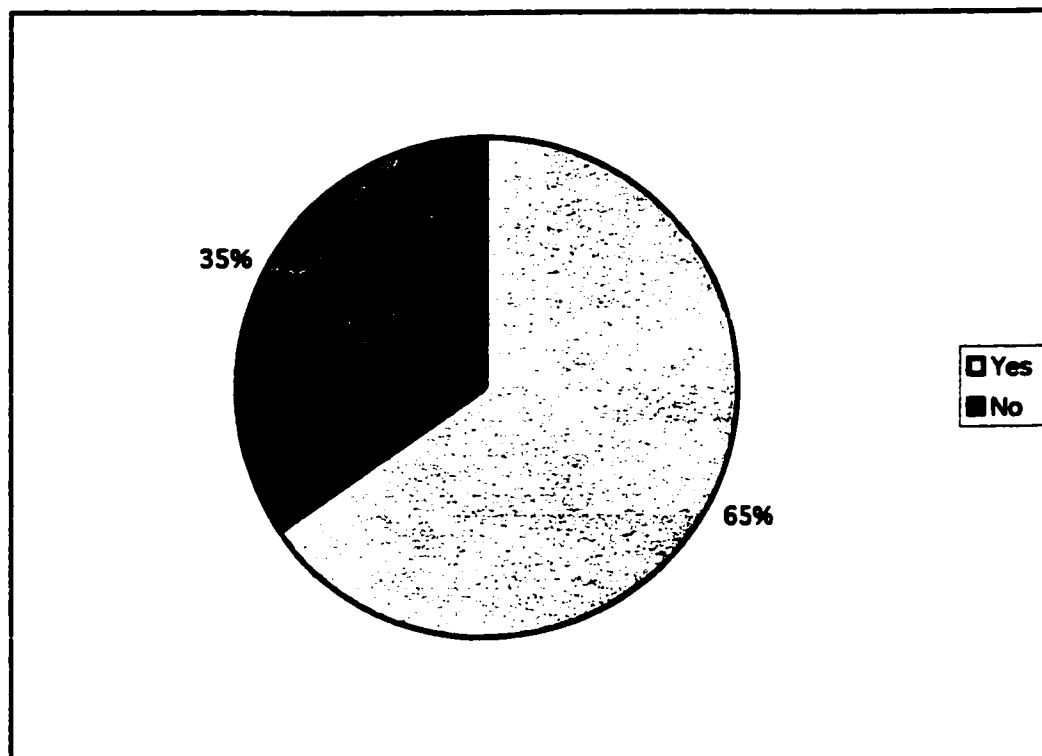


Table Seven: Did using creative dramatics require any additional money?

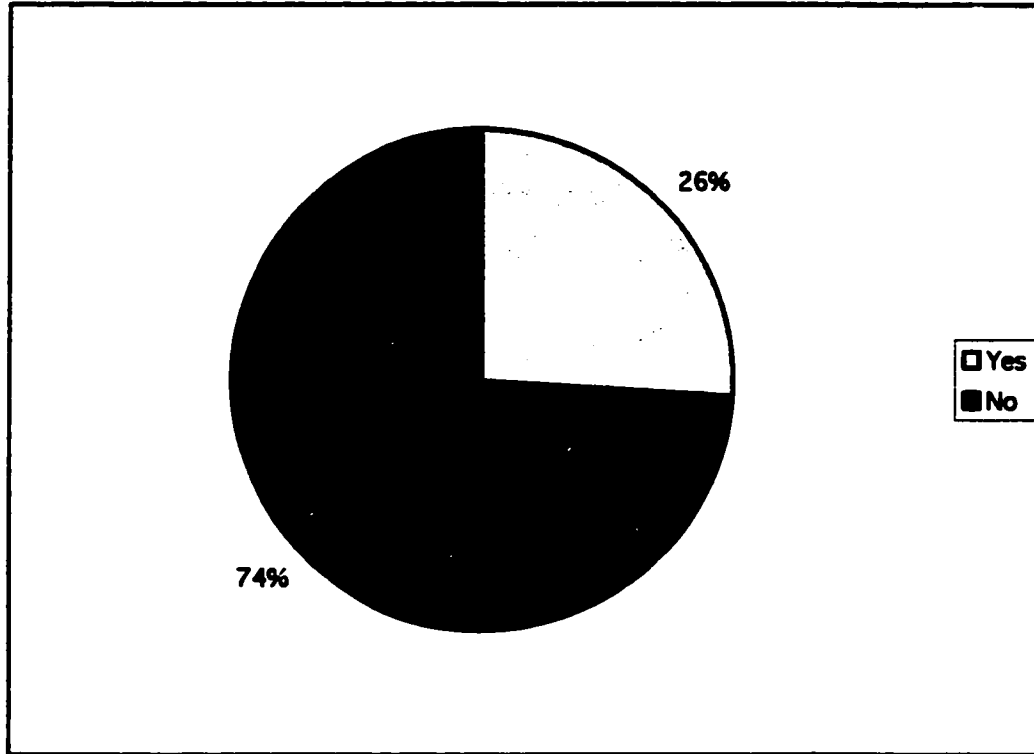


Table Eight: What teaching methods, other than traditional teaching, do you use in place of creative dramatics? *The numbers in the right hand column refer to the number of teachers who gave that response.*

Class Discussions	2
Group Projects	15
Creative Writing	3
Team Building Activities	3
No Non-traditional Methods	2
Field Trips	1
Movies	1
Manipulatives for Math and Science	2

Table Nine: What do you see as potential obstacles for using creative dramatics in your classroom? *The numbers in the right hand column refer to the number of teachers who gave that response.*

Set Curriculum Doesn't Allow Creative Teaching	4
Teachers Don't Enjoy Being "On Stage"	3
Difficult to Make Time Due to Other Requirements	4
Difficult to Use in Math	1
Some Teachers Not Willing to Try New Things	2
Easy to Overlook it as a teaching Option	1
Need to Use Time to Prep for Standardized Tests	2
Requires Additional Training	2
Need Extra Money for Props	5
Students Spend Too Much Time on Projects	1
Need Extra Time So All Students Get a Turn	3
Requires Better Classroom Management	3
Requires Too Much Time to Prepare	1
Hard to Constantly Come up with New Ideas	1
Don't Know What Creative Dramatics is	2

Analysis of Data

As the data shows, 80% of the respondents already use creative dramatics in some form in their classrooms. This number may not represent the entire teaching population in the districts surveyed, because teachers who didn't respond may not have done so due to their lack of interest in or knowledge about creative dramatics. The uses vary from reading to their class aloud, to having them act out stories from their reading primer, to having them act out math word problems. It also showed that there was great variation in teachers' desire to expand their use of creative dramatics. Some teachers said that they only use creative dramatics where it is an obvious supplement to the lesson, like story drama (the acting out of stories by the class), and they don't feel it is appropriate

in other areas. Finally, others said they only use it, again, in the obvious manner, but would like to learn how to use it in more creative ways. Others said they use it as much as they possibly can while still sticking to the guidelines of the curriculum. In chapter four, examples of lesson plans that the respondents use are detailed not only for reporting purposes but to offer examples to those teachers who would like to expand their use of creative dramatics and discuss how they overcome the obstacles of creative dramatics.

It was interesting to learn that there were teachers who had never heard of creative dramatics. This was especially interesting because the term “creative dramatics” was defined on the survey itself. Even with the definition, the teachers still had never heard of using creative dramatics. Creative dramatics is not, by any means, a new concept. Some of the literature available on the subject dated back to the early 1900s (Finlay-Johnson).

Table three details the answers teachers gave when asked “How was the use of creative dramatics successful in teaching your students new concepts? How did you measure this success?” Surprisingly, their answers varied greatly. There were answers ranging from “test scores improved” which is a very tangible way to assess the success of a program, to “brought ideas to life” which is a more abstract way to measure success and is based solely on the observations of the individual teacher. Several reasons could explain why these answers varied so greatly. First, the survey never defined what the word “success” was referring to. Success to some teachers could be increased student participation. If this is the definition they used, then answers like “brings ideas to life” and

“students more involved” are great examples of this type of success. Other teachers may have only looked at tangible, measurable successes as successes of creative dramatics, and that is where answers such as “improved reading skills” and “test scores improved” come into play. Success could be any of these things. However, not defining “success” within this survey resulted in a lot of different answers that are hard to compare. None are right or wrong, but they can’t necessarily be compared as referring to the same “success.”

If the purpose of the research is to get more information to teachers about creative dramatics and how they can use it “successfully” in their classroom, it is not as simple as asking teachers if they use creative dramatics and if they have found successes in using this method of teaching. In fact, some of the answers received could stir up debates between teachers and administrators. Take for example an administrator who is very set in her ways and her top priority is to have teachers stick to the lessons and prepare their students for standardized tests. Using arguments such as “creative dramatics gets more students involved” and “it increases student enthusiasm” as reasons why a teacher wants to try something new in her classroom, may translate to this administrator as saying “my classroom will be more about having fun.” This probably would not be a good argument in this situation.

The differing answers may also be seen as a benefit. A program developed by Classika Theatre and supported by a grant from the U.S. Education Department has proven successful in increasing 4th grade students’ SOL (Standards of Learning) test scores at Drew Model Elementary in Virginia by 25

percent last spring. (Topps) In re-evaluating the example in the above paragraph, and using the argument that creative dramatics “helps improve test scores” referencing the survey responses and the previous statement about Classika Theatre, this teacher may be able to convince the administrator that creative dramatics can work in her classroom. The wide variety of answers to “How was the use of creative dramatics successful in teaching your students new concepts?” can make the rest of the information in the study more appealing to a wide group of readers. Most teachers will be able to find something on that list of “successes” that is appealing to them and is something they would like to see in their own classroom. By finding one of their own classroom goals on the list, they may be inclined to read further about creative dramatics and how they can use it.

Although it is always positive to discuss the successes teachers had with creative dramatics, it is perhaps more interesting to discuss what teachers feel is lacking when using creative dramatics. While it is true that many respondents said they felt nothing was missing when they used creative dramatics to teach the lesson, two responses should be looked at in more detail – students thinking it is just a game and the fact that creative dramatics doesn’t allow students to practice writing. It is obvious why these two issues would concern teachers. One way that other teacher respondents suggested getting around this obstacle was to have the students write out a script for their story dramas. For example, if a teacher asked a group of children to present a skit on the first Thanksgiving, they would not only require the group to present the skit live to the class, but

also to write it out and turn in. This gives the students the valuable and necessary practice presenting their ideas in written form.

Another response many teachers gave related to the idea that all students learn in a different manner just as previous researchers had determined. Some students are visual learners while others have excellent reading comprehension. This fact requires that teachers implement many different teaching methods in their classroom. These teachers responded that they do use creative dramatics in their classrooms, but only to further the concepts that they had already taught through traditional methods. Teachers seemed to agree that creative dramatics did allow the students to be more involved with the material which allowed them to recall the information more quickly when tested on it later.

The obstacles reported in table nine are probably the most important responses for purposes of this discussion. These obstacles were not only reported by teachers who are not using creative dramatics, but teachers who do use creative dramatics as well. The teachers who do use creative dramatics said that these were reasons they didn't use it more often or they were listing reasons some of their colleagues didn't use creative dramatics.

Again, as in table three, the answers in table nine were very scattered. Unlike the original hypothesis, the answers teachers gave regarding the obstacles for using creative dramatics were not centered around lack of time or money. In addition, these answers did not come from responses to one question in particular. The survey did not include a question asking teachers what they felt

their obstacles were, but I got more responses that fit into this category than any other.

The most often received response was that the set curriculum didn't allow for creativity or there wasn't enough time due to other requirements. Although divided in the data table, these two responses address the same obstacle – curriculum requirements force teachers to be so focused on the topics that are needed for testing that they don't feel there is room for creativity in their method. The idea behind creative dramatics is to marry these two concepts so that students not only learn the lesson, but also learn the three main goals of creative dramatics – communication, collaboration, and creative thinking. It is apparent that even though many teachers are using creative dramatics successfully, teachers who aren't using creative dramatics may need some type of mentoring or training in order to implement creative dramatics into their lessons.

The fact that there were "obstacles" given without even being asked that specific question, shows just how complex a research question this is. It isn't as easy as saying to a teacher, "this is how you can save money" or, "here is an idea that doesn't require you get any additional training in theatre." In some cases it comes down to the self-confidence level of the teacher himself. In others, it is helping the teacher find a constructive way to present the idea of using creative dramatics to the administrator who approves her lesson plans. In other instances, it is a matter of showing concrete statistics proving that some students'

test scores or reading abilities improved when learning through creative dramatics.

It is important to discuss the reported successes and how they relate to the three main goals of creative dramatics as stated earlier in this thesis – communication, collaboration, and creative thinking. Table three lists the successes that teachers noticed. Under the topic of communication, teachers who use creative dramatics reported that their students were more involved and developed a better ability to work with others. In order to work well with their fellow classmates, students must develop good communication skills. These same two responses can also support the idea that creative dramatics teaches students how to collaborate with their peers.

Finally, many of the responses support the notion that creative dramatics teaches creative thinking. One response that supports this idea is the improvement teachers saw in math after using creative dramatics with their students. Math is a subject known to be troublesome for many students, but by using creative dramatics and teaching the students how to think about the math concepts in a more creative manner, they have shown improvement. Another response that fits into this category is that the biggest change was seen in visual learners. This response leads one to the conclusion that this method of teaching is most effective with students who already think creatively and furthers the idea that creative dramatics is a method that is used very successfully to support traditional methods.

Conclusion

This survey and its findings only begin to touch on the issue of using creative dramatics (or even creative teaching methods in general) in today's classroom. Although the research here details many ideas about teachers' fears and preferences in relation to creative dramatics, an additional survey with more tailored questions may help get more specific answers from the respondents.

Something that would be interesting to add to future studies similar to this one would be to ask the respondents where and when they earned their teaching credentials and what courses in creative teaching methods were offered to them. It would be interesting to see if creative dramatics was more widely used by teacher who received their credential from a school where courses in creative dramatics were offered. While very few schools offer creative dramatics as part of teacher credentialing programs, many (UCLA, San Jose State, and San Diego State to name a few) offer creative dramatics or children's theatre courses through their theatre departments that credential candidates can take as an elective. Did a significant percentage of teacher who use creative dramatics attend a school where creative dramatics or children's theatre courses were offered?

Along this same line, it would be interesting to see which schools the teachers who are using creative dramatics graduated from and compare that to which schools those who don't use creative dramatics graduated from. Is there a correlation between where a school is located and how much they explore alternative or creative teaching methods with their credential candidates?

Another change to make on future surveys would be to define the term “success” in question three of the survey. As the survey is currently worded, “success” can mean any number of things. Perhaps this should be broken down into two separate questions in the following manner: 1) What measurable successes did you have using creative dramatics in your classroom? “Measurable” refers to tangible results such as test scores; and 2) What observed successes did you have with using creative dramatics in your classroom? “Observed” refers to things that you see improve in your students that cannot be measured by any type of testing such as improved social skills, improved self-confidence, or better ability to express ideas. By reforming the questions in this manner, it may make it easier to compare the responses on similar terms and the answers may be less scattered.

Another way to enhance the design of the survey would be to make a list of areas that teachers may see successes and ask them to select items from the list that reflect successes they have seen in their students. The same could be done with obstacles. This would limit the answers teachers gave, and possibly make it easier to discuss and compare what teachers in different districts and with different levels of training and resources see as successes and obstacles. In this research, however, the survey method was effective in collecting answers that were honest and the method of questioning did not influence a teacher to state a success that they may not have thought of had it not been mentioned to them.

Other questions to add in furthering this study would be along the lines of the amount of drama training a teacher had and what their undergraduate major

was. Were there specific undergraduate majors that tended to produce more teachers who explored creative teaching methods, more specifically creative dramatics? Did only teachers with some theatre or art courses in their studies use creative dramatics?

It would also be interesting to see if the teachers are using local professional theatre as a resource. This could be accomplished by asking the survey participants to name major theatre companies in their immediate area (say within a half an hour) and what their interaction with the theatre is. This information can then be used to contact those theatres and see what types of programs they offer for schools and students. Using resources such as the internet, it was possible to gather some information from professional theatre companies local to the school districts surveyed. It would be interesting to further that by determining if a particular school had a direct connection to a professional theatre organization and how that directly effected a teacher's use of drama in their classroom. Also, a student whose parents take him to see theatre regularly may respond in a different way to a teacher using creative dramatics than a student who has no theatre exposure.

Another idea for future research that this survey suggests is to do a very specific study on one school district in particular. This type of research was conducted by Debra Hundert on the Ontario, Canada school board and published in 1996 in the *Youth Theatre Journal*. Although she did report percentages of teachers in the area who used creative drama and stated what surveyed teachers saw as advantages and disadvantages of this teaching method,

Hundert's study lacked a discussion of how teachers could overcome some of their perceived obstacles to using creative dramatics or suggestions on how to use creative dramatics. There would be many advantages to doing further research in this way. First, it would allow the researcher to gather more region specific information. Second, it may be more feasible for the researcher to go and interview teachers and administrators in this district, which could mean more respondents and a more comprehensive overview of the views of that particular pool of teachers. Third, it would allow for in-depth comparison between the answers given that the resources available to all the teachers from the particular district would act as a constant. Finally, the researcher could explore more closely how teachers in that particular district utilize the professional theatres in their area as a resource.

This research did not produce a cut and dry answer to any question along the lines of "should all teachers use creative dramatics" or "why is creative dramatics successful" or "is creative dramatics a more successful teaching method than others," nor did it attempt to. What it did do is define some of the issues that similar research needs to deal with. It presented a lot of options. It gives teachers who aren't currently using creative dramatics many arguments for and against creative dramatics which will allow them to perhaps make more informed decisions as to whether or not its use would be beneficial in their particular classroom. Lastly, it gives teachers who would like to use creative dramatics to supplement their current teaching methods but aren't quite sure how, a place to start.

Chapter Four –Teachers’ Resources

Creative Dramatics in Practice

After looking at teachers’ opinions of what they see as successes and obstacles of creative dramatics, it is beneficial to discuss programs currently in place that use creative drama as a teaching tool. Two such programs are *Different Ways of Knowing* (DWoK), a national program sponsored by the Galef Institute, and San Jose Repertory Theatre’s Red Ladder Company (SJRT). Both programs use drama to teach subjects such as reading, creative writing and social studies.

The DWoK program is based on the idea that “children learn more and are more able to use what they learn when they are engaged in generating, exploring, interpreting, and connecting ideas to solve meaningful problems” (“Lawndale” 3). In her article in the Galef Institute’s *Teacher to Teacher* newsletter, first-grade teacher Stephanie Pope reports that since her district began implementing the teaching methods in DWoK more hands-on learning, collaborative group learning, and more excited and motivated students and teachers are seen. She continues on to say that the DWoK program also helps students meet the standards of the SAT 9 test – a nation-wide standardized test.

For their *Teacher to Teacher* newsletter, the Galef Institute also interviewed Mary Beth Richerson, a fourth-grade teacher in Kentucky, about her experiences with the DWoK program. Richerson explains, “Different Ways of Knowing supports inquiry-based instruction and constructivist learning. I’m not telling kids what Columbus did and when and how. They are designing ships and

thinking and writing and acting out what it must have been like for Columbus. Our kids take an active part in their learning" ("First-Year" 14).

Another example of how the DWoK methods are being used to enhance education can be seen by discussing Rebecca Perez's second-grade class at Benavidez School in Houston, TX. For the class' unit on immigration, the students were required to take on the role of reporter and interview their parents and grandparents to gather information about what it was like for their ancestors to come to America. They were then asked to make a presentation to the class explaining what they discovered about their roots including making flags from their family's country of origin.

In their article "Cognition, Community, and Assessment: Toward Integrated Inquiry on Drama in Education," as published in Somer's compilation *Drama and Theatre in Education*, James S. Catterall and Jaye T. Darby have the following to say about the DWoK program:

This demonstration of learning through drama has many important characteristics: opportunities for student research, organizing a story through drama, putting ideas into language, developing speech, evaluating issues of historiography, incorporating ideas learned in class activities prior to the research and dramatic phases. Children extend the demonstration beyond the drama to include notebooks and journals, charts and posters illustrating key ideas or facts, and question and discussion sessions with remaining class members following the dramatic presentations. (151)

A notable program, local to San Jose, is the Red Ladder Theatre Company (SJRT) which is part of the San Jose Repertory Theatre. This award-winning program understands that children learn in different ways and strives to create a program that incorporates these varying needs with the set curriculum

requirements (as provided by school administrators) that teachers are responsible for teaching. In her 2000 season evaluation of the SJRT program, Associate Director Karen Piemme states:

Teachers recognize the need of children to be more active in the learning process, but are faced with the 'obstacle' of curriculum guidelines, standardized test preparation and the like which, they feel, leaves them little additional time to experiment with more interactive means of having children participate in the learning process. (1)

The preceding quote correlates with many of the responses teachers in this research survey gave as to what they felt were "obstacles." Programs such as SJRT work to provide examples and hands on training for using creative dramatics for teachers in an attempt to bring creative dramatics and theatre into the schools without teachers having to worry about the already tight time constraints.

SJRT goes into the local schools and uses the idea that "the most essential component of a healthy individual is the creative spirit, and when a person's creative impulses are revered, encouraged and nurtured, positive change occurs"(2). SJRT 's method of teaching using creative dramatics is its performance/ workshop. In these workshops, participants help develop a short play, use music and song to enhance their ideas, and improvise reactions in given situations to help them develop their skills. The goal is to teach empathy and understanding in the first-person in a situation that a participant might not necessarily run into in their personal life.

Through developing and writing their own scripts, SJRT allows participants to gain from "the inherent advantages provided by the discipline of

theatre, which traditionally combines the art forms of language (through playwriting), movement, sound and music, visual imagery, character development, direction and performance” (3).

When looking at the “inherent advantages” theatre provides as stated in Piemme’s evaluation of SJRT individually, one can see how creative dramatics can be useful in teaching many different academic areas. Take, for example, the language skills that are developed through playwriting. There is the obvious language skill that a participant in such a program would improve by having to physically write out the script. Since their peers will be hearing the script, a participant may be more likely to pay close attention to grammar and plot structure. These are areas that can then be applied to any type of writing including history reports, book reports, and creative writing assignments to name a few.

The element of direction that is learned through these SJRT performance/ workshops helps in the development of social skills and directly relates to the three main goals of creative dramatics that this thesis set out to discuss – it helps develop communication and collaboration skills. The student in the role of “director” must find a way to clearly convey their ideas to their peers and do it in a manner that causes the other students to want to follow these directions. The students who are being directed must learn to work together to reach the goal the director is trying to accomplish.

The evaluation of SJRT also discusses the idea that in addition to communication and collaboration, these performance/ workshops help students

learn to think creatively (the third main goal of creative dramatics this research set out to discuss). By being given a set task to complete as a group and timeframe, students must try different options, learn from their mistakes, and move on until a solution is reached. In some cases this solution may be obvious, but in many cases it requires thinking of many different possible approaches to one situation and using all those potential courses of action to reach the goal.

The ideas behind these performance/workshops sound great, but to try and look at this from a teacher's point of view, the question may arise, how does all this relate to teaching core subjects without taking up too much extra time in the school day? Around the San Jose area, there are many examples of places where SJRT has been worked into teaching reading and language arts. Here are a few:

1. SJRT has worked within the English Language Development curriculum at Horace Mann Academy, and the principal there, Adam Escoto, has noticed a dramatic rise in test scores since the school's partnership with SJRT began.
2. Third and Fourth graders at McCollam Elementary School in San Jose learned presentation skills for their advertising and marketing unit through their work with SJRT.

These are all very measurable and tangible results of SJRT's work in the San Jose area. To present concrete statistics to measure these results, Karen Piemme of SJRT discusses the percentage of students who improved in various areas as observed through the students' teachers. In the 2000 season, SJRT served 1565

individuals in the San Jose area. Success of the SJRT is determined by personal growth of the participants in selected areas. This growth is measured by observations of teachers. Before participating in SJRT, teachers are asked to assess the abilities of their students in various areas. After completion of the program, teachers fill out a second copy of the assessment tool and the before and after ratings are compared. According to this evaluation, of those 72% of them were reported to have increased their ability to articulate their thoughts and feelings, 40% are now better able to initiate new ideas, 67% improved their ability to imagine creative solutions to problems, 74% are now better at working collaboratively with their peers, 41% have demonstrated increased leadership skills, 58% have improved their capacity for focusing on a task at hand, 36% have gained as ability to learn from their past mistakes, and 84% were reported to have an increased level of self-esteem (Piemme 15). While it may be obvious how these statistics relate to the three main goals of creative dramatics – communication, collaboration, and creative thinking – it is less obvious how this has a positive effect on students' test scores as observed by participating teachers or administrators such as Adam Escoto of Horace Mann Academy. To illustrate this point, let's look, for example at the 58% of students who gained improved capacity for focusing on a task at hand. Standardized tests are generally long and tedious with a number of hours spent sitting at a desk and taking test after test. This requires a great deal of concentration from the student in order for them to successfully complete the test. While the dramatic activities did not teach math or reading skills per se, they did help the children learn to focus on

the tests, which in turn can potentially increase their test scores. Due to its successes, SJRT was honored as a semi-finalist in the President's Commission on the Arts and Humanities Coming Up Taller Awards.

In addition to the SJRT program, San Jose Rep also offers artists in schools, classroom study guides, post-show discussions, student group ticket discounts, internships, job shadowing, interactive tours and presentations, and for the first time this season they will be conducting a symposium for teachers on incorporating the form and content of our plays into their classroom curriculum.

Throughout the state of California, teachers have access to programs through The California Arts Project (TCAP). TCAP is the state's subject matter project in the visual and performing arts, and has the mission of deepening teachers' knowledge of dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, and to enhance instructional strategies for teaching these disciplines. This project is funded directly by the University of California and has regional sites throughout the state. Regional sites offer programming such as summer and intersession teaching institutes, curriculum and professional development services for schools, and workshops for teachers and administrators.

Creative Dramatics vs. Outreach

Unfortunately, not all cities and school districts have access to such developed programs as SJRT, TCAP, or DWoK. However, with a little searching one can find resources in most major metropolitan areas at their local professional theatre. To stay within the regions already discussed in this research, educational and outreach programs of theatres in Los Angeles, CA; San

Diego, CA; Phoenix, AZ; and Seattle, WA are discussed to see what local resources were available to teachers in those districts. To keep this manageable, the search was limited to professional theatre companies and professional children's theatre companies. Many opera companies, ballet companies, and music performance organizations may have similar programs, but this search will focus on theatre since the research is on creative dramatics.

The following section discusses the resources found in the researched cities. When reading through the list, it may become apparent that these resources do not address all the concerns or "obstacles" that the teachers surveyed expressed. Many times these outreach programs serve more as a vehicle for marketing the theatres' productions than as a resource for creative dramatics as a teaching method. Some do require teachers pay a fee and many require time outside the classroom. However, the concerns that these resources do address are lack of training, teachers not enjoying being "on stage" when teaching, and the difficulty to make time for creative dramatics because of other requirements. In these opportunities, the teachers are not doing the "performing." That is being taken care of by the actors and outreach staff. Many times the lessons and programs provided are designed to fit into the teaching requirements, but require that they be used along side attending a performance. In these cases, it will take extra time on the part of the teacher to adapt the ideas to fit in with their curricular needs. However, some of the theatres will customize workshops for specific areas of need. In the case of teachers needing more training, many theatres offer workshops for this purpose. They teach

teachers to use theatre as a tool to enhance a student's writing skills through playwriting activities, to enhance their analytical skills through discussions of the characters and plot, and to enhance their reading skills through careful studies of Shakespearean texts.

Phoenix, AZ. Phoenix, Arizona has three professional theatre companies: Actors' Theatre of Phoenix (ATP), The Phoenix Theatre (PT), and Arizona Theatre Company (ATC). Out of these three, I was only able to find information on community outreach from the ATP. ATP does not have an extensive outreach program along the lines of SJRT, however, they do advertise student matinees. As part of their student matinee program, ATP provides "Student Performance Guides" to teachers before they are scheduled to attend the show. Following each student matinee, audience members (the students in particular) are given a chance to ask question of the cast and crew to help them understand the show and the production process even better. The information on the ATP website ("Actors'") explains that "students attending matinees benefit by developing their critical thinking skills in assessing their experience and in using the Student Performance Guide." These student matinees are sponsored by local corporations and grant-making foundation in order to allow more students to participate.

When professional theatre companies leave a gap in the opportunities for students, community organizations may pick up the slack. Phoenix is also lucky to have the Valley Youth Theatre (VYT). VYT strives to create opportunities in performing and creative arts for the students in their area. This group not only

provides opportunities for children to participate as a performer in theatre, but also to view their peers in high quality productions. As part of their website, they have a “Letters from Teachers” section (“Valley”). Here, teachers have written in with positive feedback. One teacher from the Roosevelt School District in Phoenix said that she has noticed an increase in children’s desire to read after participating in VYT programs.

Seattle, WA. In Seattle, Washington, teachers and students have a valuable resource in Seattle Repertory Theatre (SRT). They state the mission of their education department as being “to create and sustain innovative educational experiences with diverse youth audiences that explore theatre in an atmosphere of collaboration, mutual learning, and personal growth” (“Seattle Repertory”). The educational outreach programs of SRT include online study guides for their shows and a partnership with Goodwill Learning Center exploring ways of incorporating drama into adult education courses.

Another valuable resource of the SRT is a partnership between SRT and Seattle Children’s Theatre (SCT) called “Bringing Theatre Into the Classroom.” This is a five-day workshop for teachers that addresses issues with using theatre in the curriculum to teach other subjects. The workshop also specifically deals with relating these ideas directly to the state’s curriculum standards. The education department at SRT has compiled a workbook that all teachers in attendance receive at this workshop to help them take the ideas from the seminar and bring them to life once they get back to school.

SCT is also a resource for bringing theatre into the classroom. In addition to the above mentioned workshop “Bringing Theatre Into the Classroom” in collaboration with SRT, SCT produces shows using professional actors specifically with children in mind. Part of their extensive educational outreach opportunities includes their “Specialty Workshops.” These workshops “explore non-theatre curriculum in a dramatic way” (“Seattle Children’s”). Their repertoire includes literature-based workshops using works such as *Animal Farm* and *Winnie-the-Pooh* and they also do theme-based workshops ranging from the Westward Movement to Civil Rights.

Los Angeles, CA. Because Los Angeles is so spread out, there are many programs that could be considered, however to keep the data under control, resources will be limited to those in Los Angeles proper and the immediate bordering cities. The theatre that seems to have the largest variety of educational outreach programs in the Los Angeles area is the Geffen Playhouse (GP) in West Los Angeles (Westwood Village). In a partnership with Universal Studios, the GP provides free matinees to student groups from secondary schools. As a supplement to these matinees, the GP staff holds teacher workshops prior to the performances and post show discussions with the students following the performance. They also make study guides available to the teachers before they attend the performance in order to help them prepare the students for what they are going to see. Something that the GP does in correlation with the student matinees that is unique is the structure of their teacher workshops. GP staff holds workshops for teachers prior to the scheduled matinee that not only

informs the teacher how to prepare their students for seeing the show, but also helps them come up with ways for integrating the show into their curriculum ("Geffen").

A Noise Within (ANW), Los Angeles' professional classical theatre company, has limited educational opportunities available through its programs. In addition to reduced cost student matinees, they offer workshops for students called "The Artist Within." In these workshops, artists from ANW go into the classrooms and lead activities relating to characters, themes, and language of the play that they will see in an upcoming student matinee. Unfortunately, these workshops are rather costly at \$225 for the first hour and \$100 for each additional hour. More information about ANW can be found at <http://www.anoisewithin.org/>.

Shakespeare Festival LA (SFLA) offers ideas for teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms (again only for the middle school and high school level). Through their website <http://www.shakespearefestivalla.org/textbooks/index.htm>, teachers can download workbooks to help them teach Shakespeare to ESL students. These workbooks have suggestions for questions about the text with the goal of having them read the text more closely and re-written scenes with simplified language so students who are not as familiar with the language can still understand the story. The idea is to have the students do the work from these books prior to seeing the show so they will have a better understanding of what is going on when they do see a performance.

Another program of SFLA is the “Will Power to Schools” program, which is sponsored by Sony Pictures. This program is designed to help teachers develop curriculum materials for teaching a specific Shakespeare play – this past year *Much Ado About Nothing*. Will Power to Schools is a two weekend long workshop at no cost to teachers of Los Angeles Unified School District. In addition to gaining ideas for teaching Shakespeare in their classrooms, the teachers received a free copy of a filmed version of the play (in the case of *Much Ado About Nothing* it was the Kenneth Branagh version) and a classroom set for the play. Teachers also have the opportunity to sign up for free tickets and busses to take their class to see the production of the show by SFLA.

San Diego, CA. La Jolla Playhouse (LJP), located just outside of San Diego, has extensive outreach programs for youth. These programs include a touring company that goes out into schools, libraries, and community centers to bring theatre to children that would otherwise not get to experience live theatre; Cops and Kids which is a program in conjunction with California Youth Authority’s Gang Violence Reduction program which allows youths to create scripts based on their concerns with gang violence; Playwrights Web which pairs a New York 8th grade class with one in San Diego and the students collaborate via email, snail mail and teleconferencing to create an original script with their shared ideas; The California Arts Council Project that aims to help literacy efforts within San Diego City Schools using theatre as a tool; and a partnership with Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts to help expand professional development opportunities for teachers (“La Jolla”).

While all these resources are useful, teachers may still find them difficult to find in their area. Especially schools located in a more remote area may have difficulties getting acting groups or workshop leaders to travel out to their school site. In these cases, the professional theatre companies can still be a valuable resource. For example, almost all of the theatre companies researched have study guides for their shows. These study guides offer information geared at students about the history of the play, the playwright, the time and place the play takes place and the text itself. Many of these study guides also offer suggested discussion questions and research projects for students. The study guides (which are called “workbooks” by the company) from SFLA not only offer great suggestions for things the students can look for when reading the given Shakespeare text, but also offer some re-written versions of scenes in a language that may be easier for a student to understand.

The *Othello* workbook that is available online from SFLA, begins by explaining to teachers that these lessons were designed for ESL students but can be modified to fit their needs. Second and third graders may not be able to read the texts themselves, but if the text is read aloud to them in small parts, they can do many of the activities in the *Othello* workbook. The lists of questions in the workbook are broken down scene by scene. This helps a less experienced reader focus on one area of the text to find the answers. They have to read (or in the case where the text is read aloud listen) very carefully to figure out the answers to the questions being asked, however they do not have to search the entire text for the answers. By using this method, a child can listen for words and phrases

that relate to their question. It enables them to sort through the difficult language of Shakespearean scripts and see the bigger ideas.

The lesson for Act 1, Scene 3 in the *Othello* workbook is probably the easiest to use to introduce this language to a second or third grader. The lesson asks the student to read Othello's speech about how he won Desdemona's love and list the different experiences he refers to in the speech. This lesson can easily be altered to suit a younger student. The teacher could tell the class that she was going to read them a speech from *Othello* (or any play for that matter) and they needed to listen carefully to determine the different events that the character talks about in the speech. Then the teacher reads the speech and re-asks the question. Students can either respond aloud as a group or write down their thoughts and turn them in. Perhaps the teacher feels that the *Othello* speech is not appropriate for her students. In that case, another speech from a different Shakespeare text can be chosen. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, has a few speeches by Puck that would be appropriate for a younger audience. The text doesn't even have to be Shakespeare – it could be a children's script such as *Jack and the Beanstalk* or *Cinderella* or one that the class may not be familiar with. The idea is to use the ideas in the different study guides and alter them so they are appropriate to the student group being taught. What does a student get from this exercise? First, they are exposed at an early age to a difficult text. This makes the text less intimidating when they have to read it on their own later in their studies. More importantly, the students develop comprehension skills that are essential when taking standardized tests ("Shakespeare").

The San Jose Rep's study guides are another resource that teachers in schools without access to local professional theatre may be able to use as a resource. Available online throughout the season, the study guides can be used for a variety of lessons and a variety of ages. Some of the activities can be too complex for younger children, but many can be modified for them. They include information about the play's history, the playwright, the play style, the location, further reading on the play, and discussion questions for before and after seeing the show. I will use the study guide from *The Matchmaker* as an example for discussion. San Jose Rep did *The Matchmaker* by Thornton Wilder in December 1999/January 2000. This study guide can not only be helpful for discussing the play, but there is information in it that can be used to teach about the history of San Jose for social studies, what a "farce" is for an English class, and Thornton Wilder who is one of the most known playwrights of our time. Even if a teacher is not able to see the play with her class, she can read passages from the script and use information in the study guide as guidelines for classroom discussion in an attempt to introduce the class to the story of *The Matchmaker*.

Many of the questions in the "discussion questions" section can be used as creative research projects even if the students have not seen the entire play or were not at a level to understand all the action in the play. For example, one of the questions asks students to choose their favorite movie and discuss how they would have to change it to be set in San Jose. This would only require that they have background knowledge of the city they live in. An activity like this could be used in a social studies class or an English class. The teacher could have

students re-write their favorite movie or story so that it fit into the time period of the gold rush, for example, in a unit on westward expansion. This uses the theatrical elements of setting and character and the basic subject requirements of writing and social studies to teach an engaging lesson.

One of the pre-show discussion questions for *Matchmaker* is "Describe yourself as if you were joining a dating agency. What are your hobbies and interests? What makes you stand out from the other candidates?" (San Jose Repertory 12) This project can be adapted into many different activities. A dating agency might be a bit too old for a first grader, so the lesson can be changed to you moved to a new town and are writing an article for a local newspaper about yourself so people can get to know you. Students can be given characters from the story the class is reading or the history unit they are working on and have to write the profile as if they are that person. If it is a younger grade, they can be given a fill in the blank style form to create the profile. This again uses the dramatic element of creating a character and pairs it with a history lesson.

These online resources, of course, cannot be used by teachers who do not have access to a performance of the play in the same way as a teacher who brings the class to see the show. They can, however, offer suggestions of exercises that incorporate theatre into the curriculum as illustrated above.

Teachers' Suggested Lesson Plans

In surveying teachers, many suggestions of creative dramatics based lessons that have been successful in classrooms were received. These lessons offer ways teachers can incorporate creative dramatics into any elementary school classroom without the need for additional training or resources.

Although each lesson example gives a specific grade level and topic for that activity, the lessons can be quickly modified to accommodate different grade levels and units of study. The lessons are grouped according to the goals of creative dramatics that are realized by that lesson.

The lesson plans are presented in outline format to make them easy to follow. Each lesson plan outline includes the following components:

- Lesson title
- Subject
- Grade level
- Objective
- Materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions for implementing the lesson

Following each lesson or group of lessons is a brief discussion of how that lesson or group of lessons accomplishes some of the objectives of creative dramatics and how they work around some of the obstacles. The lessons are divided into the following groups:

Lesson 1: Attention to Detail

Lessons 2-4: A Focus on Writing Development

Lessons 5-6: Research Made Fun

Lesson 7: Creative Presentation

Lesson 8: Careful Reading

Lesson 9: Focus

Even if creative dramatics is not currently being used, these lessons can act as a test to determine if a teacher wants to continue exploring this method of teaching. Hopefully, the suggested lessons will prove to not only teach the lesson intended, but keep the subject interesting and fresh in the child's mind.

Although all of the following lesson plan ideas have been suggested by the surveyed teachers and used in their classrooms, further research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of each lesson over an extended period of time with a variety of student groups in different learning environments.

Attention to Detail

Lesson #1 Title: "Welcome to the Party"

Grade Level: Second – Third Grade

Subject: History/Social Studies or English

Objective: To get students explore to and recall specific details about historical figures or characters in a book (depending on whether this lesson is being used for History or English).

Materials Needed: Index cards and a bowl

Instructions:

1. If this lesson is being used for an English class to explore characters in a particular story, write the names of the characters in the story on the cards. If it is being used for History, write the names or titles of historical figures for your history unit on the cards. Place the cards in the bowl.
2. Choose two students to “host” the party. Have the rest of the students draw cards from the bowl. These students are the “guests”
3. The hosts stand in the front of the room. One at a time, the other student “guests” approach the “hosts”. The “hosts” greet them by saying “Welcome to the party.” Then the “guests” say hello and begin to describe themselves. The round ends when the “hosts” guess correctly who the “guest” is.

Comments: This exercise works especially well when reviewing for a test to help reinforce in the students’ minds important historical figures or fictional characters.

Discussion: The main goal of this lesson is to encourage students to think creatively by using given details to come to a conclusion. Students must pay close attention to clues about the characters in order to determine who the character is. Developing the ability to pay close attention to detail and contextual clues can be very helpful in testing, especially in areas such as reading comprehension, which is a part of almost all standardized tests.

This lesson requires no additional time or money on the part of the teacher. It also doesn’t require the teacher be “on stage”. Since this activity is done as an entire class, the teacher has control over the amount of class time the

lesson takes up. It can also be used repeatedly for different lessons, and since the students know the “rules” after one time using the lesson, subsequent lessons take even less class time as the time required to explain the lesson decreases.

A Focus on Writing Development

Lesson #2 Title: Paper Plate Masks

Grade Level: Kindergarten – Third Grade

Subject: English or Reading

Objective: To help students recall summary, plot and characters in a story. Can also be used to test reading/listening comprehension.

Materials Needed: One paper plate per student, a book you are reading with your class, and crayons or markers

Instructions:

1. Choose a story you are working on in English or reading class. Read this story aloud to the class.
2. Divide the students into groups of a size appropriate to the number of characters in the story.
3. Have students recreate the story for their classmates. The paper plates can be used to make masks of the different characters.
4. Have each group present their version of the story and discuss the similarities and differences between each group’s re-creation.

* * *

Lesson #3 Title: Choose the Ending

Grade Level: Second – Third Grade

Subject: English or Creative Writing

Objective: To help students develop story writing/ creative writing skills.

Materials Needed: A book you are reading with your class

Instructions:

1. Read a story aloud to your students, but do not reading the final resolution.
2. Divide students into groups.
3. Have each group develop a presentation of what they think should be the ending of the story and have them act it out for the class.
4. Have the students discuss the differences between the endings the different groups wrote.

Comments: In addition to having the students act out their endings, they can also write them out – this will allow students to practice writing skills as well as develop creativity. These story endings can then be posted around the room with the original story.

* * *

Lesson #4 Title: Historical Drama

Grade Level: Kindergarten – Third Grade

Subject: Social Studies

Objective: To help students better understand the ideas that make up history and develop presentation skills

Materials Needed: None

Instructions:

1. Divide the class into small groups (4-5 in each group). For younger grades, like Kindergarten, it might be helpful to do this activity when aides are present so they can match up with groups and help keep them focused.
2. Give each group a “scene” from the unit of history the class is currently studying. For example, if they were studying the constitution, one group could have discussing the issues, another could have the actual writing process, and another could have the signing.
3. Instruct the groups to come up with a short “play” to teach the rest of the class about this part of history.
4. Have the groups present their “play” and discuss the ideas as a class.

Comments: One teacher that replied to the survey said that she enhances this lesson by asking parents to donate old pillowcases that the class uses to make costumes for their “play.” By getting think markers and cutting a head and arm holes in the pillowcase, the students can not only use the idea of “acting” to learn the lessons, but also develop their characters more fully.

Discussion of lessons 2-4: Like the previous “Welcome to the Party” lesson, lessons 2-4 require that the students focus on details. Additionally, by recreating the story in their own words, students develop storytelling skills that can eventually be an asset in writing development. Although in the early grades there isn’t generally an essay portion to most standardized tests, there is an essay portion in higher levels. The more comfortable students become with re-telling

their ideas, the easier it will be for them to eventually put these ideas on paper in essay form for a test.

Although it is suggested that masks for lesson #2 be made using paper plates, they can be made with construction paper or computer paper which will eliminate the cost incurred by purchasing paper plates. Again, the teacher is not “on stage” in these lessons. One obstacle that may be difficult to overcome in these lessons is the need for extra time for the students to prepare their masks and presentations. One way to reduce the amount of class time for one subject that this lesson would take up would be to have the students create their masks in art class as an art project or to have them make their masks at home as a homework assignment. Also, if the students are given a very specific amount of time to prepare their presentations and this prep time is closely monitored by the teacher (with regular reminders that the time is getting shorter to keep the students focused), “wasting time” can be dramatically reduced.

Research Made Fun

Lesson #5 Title: Historical Era

Grade Level: First – Third Grade

Subject: History or Social Studies

Objective: To have students do basic research and present their findings.

Materials Needed: Class Social Studies book and children’s encyclopedia

Instructions:

1. Discuss an era in history (such as the 1920s or colonial times – whatever is appropriate in your history or social science class) and give each student a

topic such as dance, music, art, leaders, clothing, food, or housing. Ask each student to find some information in their books or the class encyclopedia about this aspect of the time period you have given them. For example, if a student was assigned dance of the 1920s, they may find that the Charleston was that era's popular style of dance.

2. Later in the week, have the students come dressed like a character from that time period and present what they learned. For example, if the topic was music and the period was the 1940s, a student may come dressed in military garb since World War I happened in the 1940s and they may bring a Big Band record they found in the library to share.

* * *

Lesson #6 Title: Career Day

Grade Level: Kindergarten – Third Grade

Subject: Social Studies

Objective: To help students learn about different careers

Materials Needed: None

Instructions:

1. Have each student choose a career they would like to learn more about. If this lesson is being done in conjunction with a book or a history lesson, they could be asked to choose a career that is appropriate for the time period or location of the story/history lesson being studied.
2. Give them overnight or a few nights to research their career and put together a suggestive costume that their person would wear to do their

job. Give them a list of things their presentation must cover such as what a typical day for this person is like, what they wear to work, different types of people they work with, who relies on the work they do.

3. The next day (or the day the assignment is due), have the students do a short presentation as their character talking about their job. They should do the presentation in the first person as if they were the firefighter, astronaut, teacher, or whatever career they chose to research.

Discussion: Lessons 5-6 help students develop research skills at an early age. These research skills can be refined through out their educational career. Neither lesson requires any additional funding on the part of the teacher, nor does it require that the teacher be “on stage”.

Unfortunately, these lessons can easily illustrate other obstacles expressed by teachers. It can be time consuming as students may require additional time to research their topics and prepare their presentation. This obstacle can be alleviated by assigning much of the research and prep as homework. Teachers can use weekly library time to help students find a book on their topic and then students can take the book home to do the actual research on their topic. Even so, it is a lesson that requires a sizable amount of class time to allow for every student to present their research.

Creative Presentation

Lesson #7 Title: Create a World

Grade Level: Kindergarten – Third Grade

Subject: Social Studies, English/ Reading or Science

Objective: To have students re-create the world they are learning about in the classroom

Materials Needed: Construction paper, scissors, glue, markers or crayons

Instructions:

1. Review with the students the world you are trying to recreate. For example, if you are trying to build a gold mining village in your classroom, have a class discussion about what things might be included in that kind of place.
2. Have students create one of the places or things for this world that was discussed. To continue the gold mining town example, there might be pans to pan for gold, golden nuggets, a general store, and a school. Post all the various pieces of the world around the room.

Comments: This activity can be as simple or involved as the teachers want to make it. It can end with the posting of the various places and things the children made to represent the world. As an extension of this project, I have seen teachers have their class come dressed as people from that world or have students bring items they might use in that world. It can go even further by playing games that may have been played during that time, building using a substance that might have been used to build in that world or preparing food that may have been eaten in that world.

The world that is created does not necessarily have to be a historical place or a place in a book the class is reading. This lesson can be turned into a science lesson by having the class create the world of the moon and having them act out

how they would eat, sleep or move on the moon. Another idea for a more science related world would be to create the world the dinosaurs lived in.

Discussion: While time consuming, this lesson helps students learn to communicate ideas that have been taught in class in a creative way. This helps them develop presentation skills which can be refined and used throughout their lives. When first looking at this lesson, the question of when would a teacher have time to work in all the segments involved in creating the world. By spreading various parts of the lesson across the curriculum, time allotted for one subject will not be monopolized.

Take, for example, creating the world where dinosaurs lived as part of a science lesson. This project can span the subjects of science (used to research and learn about the dinosaurs), art (clay can be used by each student to create the dinosaur of their choice which not only will serve as an art project, but also the manipulation of the clay will further develop their motor skills which is an essential part of child development), and spelling (where names of the dinosaurs can be used as bonus words).

Careful Reading

Lesson #8 Title: Story Drama

Grade Level: Kindergarten – Third Grade

Subject: English, Reading, Social Studies

Objective: To help students with comprehension of ideas in scripts.

Materials Needed: Copies of a script for children. There are many good books available with children's scripts available at local libraries.

Instructions:

1. Pass out roles to various children in the class.
2. Read the script aloud as a group having the children read their lines when time comes. In order to get all students involved, switch parts around after each scene or on a daily basis.

Discussion: Teachers who recommended this activity said that it helped students read the texts more carefully because they needed to follow along so they didn't miss their lines and improved reading comprehension skill. It requires little additional time, however it does require a small amount of money to copy the script for each student. This may or may not be an issue depending on each individual school's copy policy for teachers.

Focus

Lesson #8 Title: Solid, liquid, gas

Grade Level: Kindergarten – First Grade

Subject: Science

Objective: To help students understand the basic ideas of solids, liquids, and gasses. Uses movement as a teaching tool.

Materials Needed: None

Instructions:

1. This is a variation of "Simon says". All students begin standing either next to their desk or in a free area of the classroom.
2. The teacher will call out one of the following terms: solid, liquid, gas.

3. The students then must move in their space in the manner that they think that type of substance would move. For example, for liquid they may make wavy motions with their arms. For gas, they may blow into the air. And for solid, they may stand still. It may be helpful for younger students, to have discussed these possibilities as a group prior to the game.
4. Once the term is called out, the teacher looks around the room to make sure all students are moving like the type of substance called out. If they are not, they are out and must take a seat.
5. This continues until only one student is left standing.

Discussion: This lesson, while requiring some additional time, helps students develop increased ability to focus on a task. As the round progresses and the pace increases, the level of focus required increases as well. As discussed in the Red Ladder evaluation, the ability to focus on a task can help students when they are required to focus on a single task for an extended period of time, such as in the setting of a standardized test. This lesson not only teaches students to focus, but does it in a way that allows them to review concepts they are learning in science.

Appendix A – Teacher Letter and Survey

November 7, 2000

Dear Teacher,

My name is Kristi Kraemer and I am a graduate student at San Jose State University. I need your help in conducting a study on teacher's perspectives on creative dramatics in the elementary school classroom. The results of the study will allow non-teachers to learn the benefits and obstacles of arts based teaching methods. Attached is a questionnaire asking about your experiences with creative dramatics and how you may or may not use creative dramatics in your classroom. Will you please take 10 minutes to complete the form and mail it back to me in the self addressed, stamped envelope provided? If it is more convenient for you, you can reply to the questions via email and send your answers to atticusandkristi@earthlink.net. In order for me to get my thesis in on time, I need to get all surveys returned to me by March 1, 2001.

You should understand that your participation is voluntary and that choosing not to participate in this study, or in any part of this study, will not affect your relations with San Jose State University.

Note that filling out this survey has no potential risks or benefits to you as a participant. Please keep this letter for your records as return of this survey implies consent.

The results of this study may be published, but any information that could result in your identification will remain confidential.

If you have questions about this study, I will be happy to talk with you. I can be reached at (408) 253-7362. If you have any questions or complaints about research subjects' rights, or in the event of a research related injury, please contact Nabil Ibrahim, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research at (408) 924-2480.

Sincerely,

**Kristi Kraemer
Graduate Student, San Jose State University Department of Theatre Arts**

Thesis Research Survey
Please return this survey to:
Kristi Kraemer
10100 Torre Ave. #107
Cupertino, CA 95014

or via email: kristi728@yahoo.com

This survey is designed to get a general feel for how and how often teachers use Creative Dramatics in their classroom. For the purposes of this survey, Creative Dramatics is defined as the use of theatre games, improvisational theatre and theatre tools (such as role playing and storytelling) to teach a lesson. Please be as specific as you can. Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Use of Creative Dramatics in the Classroom

Grade Level _____ School District/City, State _____

Do you use any form of Creative Dramatics in teaching core subjects such as math, social science or reading? If yes, how? _____

If you do use Creative Dramatics in your classroom, was it difficult to create a program that incorporated Creative Dramatics into the teaching of basic subject requirements? _____

How was the use of Creative Dramatics successful in teaching your students new concepts? How did you measure this success? _____

Do you think anything was missing from the lessons by using this style of teaching that is present in more traditional styles of teaching? Explain. _____

Is this something that any teacher (regardless of whether they have an arts background or not) can utilize in their classroom? _____

Do you feel this method of teaching requires any more time or money than standard teaching? _____

If you do not use Creative Dramatics in your classroom, do you use a different method of teaching that you feel especially enhances student performance? _____

If you do not use Creative Dramatics, do you have other methods you use to accomplish the goals of Creative Dramatics, such as student self confidence, ability to work as a team and commitment to learning? _____

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